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# Rickover: The Struggle for Excellence.

William S. Murray

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productions. This idea is silly and elitist, and is disproved by the authors themselves. In several other passages they discuss significant congressional work, including a hearing by former senator John Glenn, who chaired the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee.

There is no criticism of President Bill Clinton in this book. The authors repeatedly show him in a good light as prodding the lethargic toward caring about this new and very dangerous problem. The authors do admit to lapses in his administration, but they attribute them to others—for example, Secretary of Defense William Cohen, who in a press conference hoisted a five-pound bag of sugar to make a point about how anthrax could kill half the District of Columbia. Some think he exaggerated (and the authors agree), yet when reporting the argument Miller, Engelberg, and Broad treat Cohen unfairly by mixing references to Washington, D.C., and its far larger metro area. Also, just how much should one care if Cohen's five-pound bag of sugar was light by two pounds, or ten, when the next chapter states that the Soviets were making 4,500 metric tons of anthrax every year?

The efforts by many U.S. officials and scientists were important responses to a reality well stated in this work: the U.S. public health system must be better integrated into its national defenses—a need recognized early on in Cold War civil defense. Although civil defense later declined, by 1989 the need, if not apparent, was nonetheless great. Iraq was busy brewing veritable swimming pools full of anthrax, tularemia, glanders, bubonic plague, as well as smaller amounts of other agents. The Soviets' formidable *biopreparat* program would remain dangerous, even in decline, and even now

Russia cannot be fully trusted on biowar issues, say the authors.

Information on biological agent production came to light throughout the 1990s. Weapons of mass destruction are now a prime reason why the hottest topic in Washington is “unfinished business” with Baghdad. But with that challenge comes another. Whatever the world community may do to stop Iraq's weapon development program, Iran will still remain, wealthier than its neighbor and equally ready to kill people, as proven by three decades of transnational terrorism and ongoing development of a range of weapons of mass destruction. North Korea is still an odd blend of militarism, weapons of mass destruction, and occasional fatuity. There must be a strategy that deals with more than Saddam Hussein alone.

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Duncan, Francis. *Rickover: The Struggle for Excellence*. Annapolis, Md.: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2001. 416pp. \$37.50

Dr. Francis Duncan served as the official historian to the Atomic Energy Commission and Department of Energy and worked in Admiral Hyman G. Rickover's office from 1969 until Rickover's retirement in 1982. Duncan also has had access to much of Rickover's personal correspondence, as well as that of his immediate family. Indeed, Rickover's widow wrote the foreword to this book. This is Duncan's third book on Rickover, for whom he candidly admits great admiration. Although the author's familiarity with and admiration for his subject

defines the book and gives it credibility, it also constitutes the book's greatest weakness.

Duncan thoroughly chronicles Rickover's methods of achieving his goals. This makes compelling reading for anyone familiar with the U.S. Navy's nuclear propulsion program. Past and present nuclear-trained officers and sailors will likely be fascinated by how Rickover manipulated naval and congressional bureaucratic processes to achieve his goals. Many may find themselves nodding familiarly at Duncan's incantations of Rickover's proven formula for success—hard work, sacrifice, self-discipline, conservative engineering, and technical mastery. Others, however, may shake their heads when they read how Rickover plotted and pulled strings to achieve flag rank, and how he fought retirement, serving as an admiral for more than twenty-seven years until he finally retired at the age of eighty-one, in 1982. Still, although these stories are interesting and tell us much about Rickover's character, a biography should offer more.

As Duncan aptly shows, Rickover is justly remembered as the father of the nuclear navy. However, Rickover is almost equally remembered for his abrasive and disdainful behavior, his vindictiveness, and his arrogance. Unfortunately, Duncan pays little attention to these characteristics, mentioning them only briefly. True, Duncan does acknowledge that Rickover could be unpleasant. He tells how in 1951 an admiral advised Rickover that "he could not get along with people" and pointed out how in a lecture Rickover had angered his audience of submarine officers "by talking down to them and calling them stupid." This anecdote is notable, however, for its inclusion rather than its honesty. Instead

of acknowledging and criticizing, or at least lamenting, Rickover's difficult personality, Duncan asks readers to empathize with the man. For example, in 1958 Rickover was not invited to the White House reception honoring USS *Nautilus*'s passage under the North Pole. This slight, says Duncan, "hurt him deeply." Years later, in 1982, Rickover unleashed a tirade during a meeting with President Ronald Reagan, venting "the fury of a goaded man who felt manipulated, patronized, and humiliated." But it is difficult to feel much sorrow for the old admiral, who, at least by reputation, was so often guilty of even worse behavior. One can imagine that Rickover's long-standing adversaries and enemies would be acutely aware of Duncan's apparently inadvertent irony.

Another weakness is Duncan's short shrift to Rickover's private life. In the early chapters, Duncan makes significant use of letters between Rickover and his first wife during their courtship and early marriage, but that's it. His first wife receives little further mention, and his son receives even less. Rickover's second marriage gets only slightly more attention. The near absence of discussion between Rickover and family or friends leaves a critical void. No reason is offered for these omissions. Perhaps Duncan believed that Rickover, private citizen, did not warrant as much attention as Rickover, public servant. Perhaps Rickover's family authorized the biography on the condition that his personal life remain off limits. The absence of this material is striking and yet possibly revealing. It could be that once Rickover lost himself in his work, his family life suffered, which would not be surprising. Rickover demanded that level of commitment and sacrifice from those who

worked for him, and all indications are that he demanded the same of himself.

One comes away from this biography with an appreciation for Rickover's accomplishments in the Navy but with no understanding of the man. Rickover certainly left an enduring and immensely valuable legacy, but Duncan should have been fully open and fair, reporting all the pertinent aspects of his life. A biography should neither unduly venerate nor unjustly condemn. Duncan comes perilously close to writing a hagiography. Most readers would have much preferred honesty and a more complete depiction of the complex human being Hyman Rickover was.

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Ring, Jim. *We Come Unseen*. London: John Murray, 2001. 270pp. £20

Books about submarines are generally disapproved of, unless they are technical volumes describing the characteristics and performance of potentially hostile fleets. A couple of recent accounts of American operations have run into shallow water. For example, Roger Dunham was obliged to censor much of his *Spy Sub* (Naval Institute Press, 1996) and conceal the fact that he had served on the USS *Halibut* on classified projects, one of which was the discovery of the wreck of a Soviet submarine in the Pacific. Exercising discretion, Dunham called his boat *Viperfish* and never identified the *K-219*, the Soviet Golf II that went down in 1968 with ballistic missiles aboard and became the target of a celebrated CIA salvage operation, code-named JENNIFER.

Two years later, Dunham's efforts to comply with the demands of the U.S. Navy to protect *Halibut* proved counterproductive when Sherry Sontag, Christopher Drew, and Annette Lawrence Drew published their best-selling *Blind Man's Bluff: The Untold Story of American Submarine Espionage* (PublicAffairs, 1998). Their detailed description of the eavesdropping and other secret operations conducted by *Halibut* over many years had clearly been informed by inside sources. Finally, John Pina Craven, formerly the chief scientist with the U.S. Navy's Special Projects program, released *The Silent War: The Cold War Battle beneath the Sea* (Simon & Schuster, 2001), giving more details of *Halibut's* activities and providing his own astonishing explanation of the loss of the *K-219*. According to Craven, the Soviet submarine's commander had been preparing for a rogue missile launch aimed at Hawaii when his vessel sustained a sudden, catastrophic accident that sent it plunging to the sea floor.

Until recently, such disclosures have been uniquely American, with almost nothing released in England about the Royal Navy's nuclear partnership with its U.S. cousins or about its contributions to the clandestine combat fought in the Arctic against the "boomers" (ballistic-missile submarines) of the Red Banner Northern Fleet. That silence has now been broken by Jim Ring, who marks the British submarine service's centenary with remarkable revelations about the cat-and-mouse games played off Murmansk, the extraordinary phenomenon of "ice damage" (a euphemism for underwater collision), as well as the deployment of hunter-killer submarines to the South Atlantic in 1982 during the Falklands War.